

From symbolic temple to dematerialization: a journey through library architecture from the 20th to the 21st century

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ISBN 9781719853781
Independently Published

1st edition in English
August 22nd, 2018

Image of the cover:
Media Library of Sendai. Author: Scarletgreen. Source: Wikipedia

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Foreword

I first heard about the term media library in the film by the critic and director, Éric Rohmer, *L'arbre, le maire et la médiathèque* (1993). In fact, it was a term that had been used since the 1980s to refer to the libraries that were coming, that we sensed were coming or wanted to be coming, and that in the 1990s it was physically completed, especially in France, but it has a significant milestone in the media of Sendai (Japan), perhaps because it is one of the few built with the intention of becoming a typology that would inaugurate the 21st century.

The Media Library of Rohmer's film was never built. It was a mirage. The term media library (almost) is no longer used. And when it is served, it is a library.... Over the years we understand that we don't have to be influenced by these terms that we invent or generate to accompany technology. At the time, without the visibility of the Internet that we have today, these types of buildings containing digital warehouses would replace libraries to become a kind of palace for CD-ROMs and future digital media. It has been shown that it does not. The Internet has revolutionized everything, but libraries, and especially those with a good building, have been flexible enough to adapt to new situations and the next ones that may arise.

The future, more or less near, that awaits libraries, nobody knows. The example of the media library is still an erroneous forecast, like most of the many predictions made in all areas. This is where the interest of Daniel Gil Solés' essay lies. It's not about futurology. He offers us a discourse that far from taking historical impulse to justify a future proposal of lights and colours and that in a few years, not many years, may be out of date, he proposes a simple and precise review from the 20th century to be able to analyse the current state of the transformation of library architecture, and above all he outlines the elements that can condition, a risky exercise as the essay says, the new contexts of libraries without underestimating the timeless functions that may never disappear.

Linked to the firm humility and mischievous austerity that the text exudes, it seemed to me to be a good idea in this text to begin with the 20th century and not to want to embrace many previous centuries. The buildings that have stood the test of time, whether they stand or not, are still heirs to all the previous architecture and therefore this wealth is already intrinsically incorporated and represented. Or does anyone think that the library of the Exeter Academy of Louis I. Kahn does not contain the appropriate ingredients, for example, of representation and comfort, of accumulated wisdom of history?

I can't help but say that it is obvious that we would all take our own "hits", as I would include, without a doubt, the mythical and unbuilt library of the Illinois Institute of Technology (Chicago) by Mies van der Rohe; but the selection made is clear and clarifying. It is seeing the examples that are proposed chronologically where the common denominator is flexibility and comfort, as a raw material with which to build any concept.

Finally, I would like to highlight the respect and interest that the author has always shown for architecture. It is not the simple vision of the librarian or documentalist focused on the inertia of his profession, but maintains a holistic vision where he has understood that architecture has a fundamental role. His blog "BauenBlog" is a reference. Sometimes you think you're an architect too, but you don't say it. But how else is it understood that in his last article included in the epilogue at the end of the essay on the Librarian Unum is a real provocation and subtle proposition for any architect who loves architecture?

Josep Maria Miró i Gellida
April 2018

Preface

This book is the result of the extension and improvement of the article that, with the same title, was published in issue 38 of June 2017 of the digital journal *BiD: textos universitaris de biblioteconomia i documentació*. This expansion and improvement has consisted in the addition of new sections that complement and deepen the argumentation already expressed in the article, together with the inclusion of new bibliographical references, as well as the presence of an epilogue that, as a kind of philosophical and professional reflection, serves as a conclusion. In addition, a prologue has also been included, by the architect Josep Maria Miró i Gellida -responsible for the Nitidus studios- and who is the author of the future Provincial Public Library of Barcelona, which has yet to be built (and which is one of the oldest and most persistent demands of the librarian collective in Catalonia). As with the publication of the article, the book also aims to establish an evolution in the architecture of libraries throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. This evolution highlights the different transformations that the library buildings have undergone, adapting to different forms, but above all to respond to the different social and cultural realities and also changing characteristics of each period and each historical moment. It proposes an evolution divided into 5 major architectural transformations. For each of these five transformations, one or more paradigmatic libraries from around the world are presented, clearly exemplifying the transformation to which reference is to be made. Each presentation is accompanied by an explanation of its main characteristics in terms of spaces and architecture, to finally argue this decision based on quotations from external sources and also with its own argumentation. It should be noted that quotations from other languages have been translated into Spanish. The result is a chronological and historical evolution that serves to frame and contextualize, ultimately, the fifth and final current transformation of libraries. The book also includes an extensive bibliography that should serve as a starting point for future and new studies on the subject.

1 Introduction

Library buildings have undergone a real revolution in design and conception, from the beginning of the 20th century to well into the 21st century. In fact, at the beginning of this journey at the beginning of the 20th century, there was an image and a social presence that still conceived of the library as a closed and hermetic iconic temple that preserved and guarded the knowledge of humanity, and that was a direct heir to a tradition that *"from the beginning of libraries more than six thousand years ago, until the Middle Ages with the appearance of libraries in universities, highlights the function of custody and safeguarding of the same of the documents housed within them"* (Priero Gutiérrez, 2008). In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, it became an open centre (perhaps the most open public building), from which all the world's knowledge can be accessed, and where the weight of the building's design lies in the function of consultation. This radical change in its conception, use and form has gone hand in hand with the opening, expansion and globalization of information and knowledge, a trend that began after the end of the Second World War and is now fully consolidated and integrated into our structures, and which is characterized by the digitalization of information to guarantee access, preservation and study. And it is precisely digitisation that is one of the elements, perhaps the most important, that is leading libraries to a dematerialisation of their buildings and spaces.

This book reviews this evolution in order to try to understand and contextualize it in each historical moment, and to give a glimpse of what some of the futures of the library buildings might be. This tour is divided into 5 major moments, and each of them will present the main architectural landmarks, buildings and library buildings from around the world, along with a reasoned explanation of why that architecture and what those buildings represented at that time. In the development of this argumentation there have been included abundant quotations from other works, which serve as reinforcement and allow a better contextualization of the discourse, and which have always been translated into Spanish. An evolution that is at the same time a success story, and which has led libraries to become the most representative public building of contemporary societies, and to be one of the best valued and respected by the general public.

Finally, there is a wealth of literature on library architecture. Although offering a rigorous and exhaustive bibliographical review of the material is not an objective of this book, it is necessary to make a small selection so that the reader can consult some basic and essential texts to begin with in the matter. To begin with, **Faulkner-Brown's 10 classic commandments**, originally published in 1973 (and later revised in 1980), synthesize in 10 points the basic characteristics of every library building: *flexible, compact, accessible, accessible, extensible, with space for readers, organized, comfortable, safe, constant and indicative* (Fuentes Romero, 1995). Initially these points were intended for university libraries, but over time they have proved to be valid for any type of library (Benítez, 2013). It is also worth noting the IFLA's technical and normative publications, of global impact, contained in *Publications from*

Library Buildings and Equipments, which represent a very important body of standards and reference. In the same vein as this book, we must speak of the article already mentioned by Prieto Gutiérrez (2008) in which he also makes an evolution of the library spaces, with the argument of an evolution that has gone from prioritizing custody to encouraging consultation. To finish this small bibliographical review, the book by Santi Romero (Romero, 2004) is of obligatory mention. It offers a complete theoretical-practical methodology on the design, planning and construction of new library buildings, and has already become a reference and reference manual for all those interested in the subject. Also noteworthy from Romero himself (Romero, 2010) is an article published in issue 25 of the journal *BiD: textos universitaris de biblioteconomia i documentació*, in which a detailed tour is made of the different stages necessary to follow in the creation and construction of a library, and where the creation process followed with the Biblioteca Este Paluzie de Barberà del Vallès (province of Barcelona) is given as an example. Finally, we should also mention an article by Gil Solés (2011) in which a selective compilation of information resources on the web about architecture and libraries is made, with an extensive critical commentary on the characteristics of each of them.

2 The Mancomunitat: the symbolic temple and the survival of neoclassicism

It may seem paradoxical to start a book on the changes in library buildings talking about the libraries of the Mancomunitat de Catalunya of 1915, but they serve to **contextualise** the beginning of our journey. Although the Mancomunitat promoted a model that was innovative and modern at the time (based especially on the conception of the same as a System and with the foundation of the professionalization of the personnel) (Mayol, 2005) and that gathered the last international tendencies coming from the United States and the United Kingdom, for what respects to the architecture of the buildings still *pedra a clear neoclassical inheritance*. In fact, all the first buildings in the libraries of the Mancomunitat were designed by the same architect, Lluís Planas, and *"are buildings with a neoclassical frame that incorporate elements of Greek and Roman architecture, such as the columns, the access staircase and the frontispiece on the porch of the entrance. As an ornamental detail, two circular gazebos with fine columns crown the two ends of the façade"* (*Les biblioteques...*, 2014, p. 11), while inside the building the premises had to be *"own, independent, clean, white, clear, decorated with hygienic and economic coquetry, and presenting inside and out an aesthetic, beautiful and pleasing appearance to the eye"*. (Mayol, 2005). In fact, the first four libraries designed by the Mancomunitat, those of Sallent, Les Borges Blanques, Valls and Olot follow this pattern point by point. Eugeni d'Ors, with this type of library, achieved two very clear objectives: on the one hand, to obtain a clear, quick and clear visual identification of the library in its closest surroundings; and on the other hand, he stressed and gave emphasis to the new buildings and the new concept of the library of the Mancomunitat.



Figure 1. Façade of the Popular Library of Sallent. Photographic collection of the Sant Antoni Maria Claret de Sallent Library. Source: [Wikipedia](#)

Thus, the legacy of a neoclassical conception of the buildings survived with the Mancomunitat: **the buildings were conceived as authentic symbolic temples that overturned the Catalan librarian panorama of the time.** In this way *"this site reinforces the image (...) of the library as a temple of culture to which one must make a pilgrimage (...). The buildings could not be spectacular or pompous because of the costs, but they were emblematic buildings; they managed to attract the elegance and the classic look that gave them an air of nobility, an image that lasted over the years and that identified them".* (Mañà Terré, 2010, p. 52). That is to say, from tradition to change a present librarian who was considered to need to be changed and modernized. And surely this neoclassicism was influenced by the Noucentisme movement, then prevailing in Catalonia and of which D'Ors was one of the greatest exponents; a Noucentisme that promoted values such as reason, precision, order, serenity, measurement and clarity... All of these values can be seen represented in the buildings of the libraries of the Mancomunitat. For example, in the building of the Sallent Library, which *"was an impressive, large, white, neoclassical-style building, which was described as a 'sanctuary of culture' or 'temple of knowledge'".* It was located on the outskirts of the village, as Eugeni d'Ors recommended in his project to build a system of public libraries: *the building had to be isolated and surrounded 'only by air and vegetation', as if it were a pilgrimage to access the culture... To make it accessible, the village had to build a bridge over the small river and develop a promenade that would lead to the library. It can be said that the construction of the library modeled the current urban physiognomy of Sallent. Later, on both sides of the promenade, two schools, a kindergarten and a park were built, leaving the population with a large space dedicated to education and leisure",* in the words of its director Quim Crusellas (Basagaña, 2015). This symbolism, this vision of the library building as a temple of wisdom and culture, was also reinforced not

only in the library of Sallent, but also in the other libraries built by the Mancomunitat, especially if we bear in mind the place where it was decided to build them. Thus, *"in the Projecte it is established that buildings must be able to be located far away and isolated from other buildings and surrounded only by air and vegetation. The first libraries built under the direction of D'Ors were located outside the town, on paths or paths that often led to hermitages or sanctuaries. It is significant that the library of Valls is built next to the sanctuary of Mare de Déu del Lledó; that of Olot, in the grounds of the garden city; that of Sallent, in the countryside of Palau, outside the town, and that of Canet, on the promenade leading to the sanctuary of La Misericòrdia"* (Les biblioteques..., 2014, p. 11). In fact, and in a whole declaration of intentions, *"for D'Ors, the library acquires the character of a temple of wisdom, a temple of culture, to which one must make a pilgrimage in the search for knowledge"* (Les biblioteques..., 2014, p. 11). Although over the years all these populations have grown and incorporated libraries into their urban fabric, the original location of the libraries was completely the opposite of the modern thesis, which prioritizes a good location of the library within the city. Indeed, the philosophy and conception of the library has changed much in just over 100 years.

3 Airs of change from the north: the first modernity

If the Mancomunitat libraries were Point 0 for the library buildings, **the first transformation came about 10 to 15 years later**. The first important change in the design and conception of libraries, the first modernity, is found in two examples that have transcended, that represented a break with previous models and that managed to create a new dialogue between library and architecture. These two libraries are the Stockholm Public Library, the work of Erik Gunnar Asplund (1885-1940); and the Viipuri Public Library, the work of Alvar Aalto (1898-1976), "*an almost foundational work of his mature period*" (Prat, 2007).

Gunnar Asplund builds the Stockholm Public Library between autumn 1924 and autumn 1927. Although it is still a library of classical lines (the typical shape of a circle surrounded by a square),¹ **I think it can be framed in the transition to the Modern Movement, while already incorporating some concepts that will adopt (with modifications) later libraries, especially in the field of internal distribution and circulation**. These aspects are precisely the great contribution of this library. The most significant element, without a doubt, is the large central circular floor plan that houses the loan hall (located in the centre of the circle), illuminated from above, and where a large part of the open-access collection is stored, open to the public, and distributed around the entire circumference of the room, up to three levels high. This aspect facilitates control by Library staff and thus gives visual continuity throughout the room, thus adding the concept of panopticism for the first time... The aim is to find the shortest possible distance to the loan desk, which becomes the nerve centre of the library, facilitating communications and simplifying distribution as much as possible. Vertical communications are organized around this central room. Another innovative aspect incorporated by Gunnar Asplund was that of adding different entrances to the library depending on the users or the functions to be carried out inside it: thus, it differentiates accesses for adults, library staff and children.

¹ In terms of panopticism, I like to recall the project of the King's Library, by Étienne-Louis Boullée from 1785, which has never been completed and in which you can see a large, very wide and diaphanous room, without any visual obstacles. Obviously, Gunnar Asplund's project is radically different from the one conceived by Boullée, but the background and philosophy of the circular room of the Stockholm Library is, I believe, the same.



Figure 2. Inside the roundabout of the Stockholm Public Library. Author: Holger Ellgaard.
Source: [Wikipedia](#)

[Alvar Aalto](#) built the Viipuri Library (located in the present Russian city of Vyborg) between 1933 and October 1935 (the design of the building began in 1927). It is located in the middle of a park, which gave Aalto more freedom by applying a simple and radical construction method. Thus, although the original proposal of 1927 was marked by Nordic classicism and was related to the Stockholm Public Library (of the same year), the final proposal brings it closer to the Modern Movement and the [functionalism](#) of before World War II: in fact, the historiography of Modern Movement architecture considers it *"the first regional manifestation in the Modern Movement"* (Norberg-Schulz, 1997); I would personally add that it is **a key work of 20th century world architecture**. After the war, it was abandoned for 10 years, until 1955-1961 when a restoration process was carried out under the direction of Soviet architects Petr Moseyevitch Rozenblum and Aleksandr Mihailovich Shver (*Viipuri Library...*, 2017). We can find in the library the constant that is repeated in all the other libraries of Alvar Aalto: **the sunken patios for books**, located in the center of the building, and large central areas on two levels, with large open spaces and without obstacles, and in which there is abundant zenithal light -in Viipuri, through 58 skylights in the reading room- (Álvarez, 2014); and all in a continuous section. In the words of Aalto himself (the translation is mine): *"... When I designed the city library, in Viipuri, for long periods of time I pursued the solution with the help of primitive drawings of some kind of fantastic mountainous landscape, where cliffs lit by suns in different positions, from which I gradually arrived at the concept for the library building. The architectural core of the library consists of reading and lending areas at different levels and plateaus, while the centre and the control area form the highest point, above the different levels. The children's sketches have only a direct connection with the architectural conception, but joined together, in section and plan, they create a kind of unity between the horizontal and*

vertical structures...". (Library in Viipuri, 2015)² ... Another fundamental aspect in the conception of this library is Aalto's use of the light that enters the building: *"In fact, he will end up using natural light to break the feeling of isolation, of suffocation, and artificial light for the necessary visual comfort in a library. It reaches the ceiling as well, but is reflected through the walls and has its origin in some specifically designed lamps"* (Prat, 2007). We can clearly see the differentiation in the uses of light, which enter the building with separate and independent objectives, but with the right proportion of each of them generate a harmonious and coherent whole.³



Figure 3. Inside the Viipuri Library. Author: Reskelinen. Source: [Wikipedia](#)

² In 2013, the restoration of the Library, begun in 1992, was completed thanks to the efforts of the [World Monuments Fund](#) through [World Monument Watch](#). A report can be seen in Esakov (2017).

³ Two sketches by Aalto himself study the effects of light entering the library's reading room. These are two separate sketches, one for natural light and the other for artificial light; something that may at first be surprising, but which I understand makes all the sense in the world, since for Aalto they have different characteristics and final objectives, and therefore they must also be worked on separately. However, with a global and overall purpose.

4 Kahn and the search for form: a new library

The second transformation of the library building takes place with the [Exeter Academy Library](#), built by [Louis I. Kahn](#) (1904-1974) between 1965 and 1972. For Kahn, the **search for the "form" of libraries will be a priority throughout his professional career**, and with the Exeter Library he culminates this search (begun in a radically different way a few years earlier with the University of Washington Library). Kahn completes a search, but at the same time he begins a new form and a new modern conception of libraries, which is still alive and well. *"I see the library as a place where the librarian can display books, purposely opened by selected pages to seduce readers. There should be a place with large tables on which the librarian can put the books and the readers can take the book and bring it to light"* (Kohane, 1989). This small fragment of the text is the essence of these three spaces that would define the basic form of a library: a space for the exhibition of books, a second space for the relationship and collective meeting between readers and books; and finally, a third space where there is an intimate and "private" relationship of users with books and light (i.e., areas of reading and concentration). In a second comment, Kahn further defines and clarifies the conceptual and physical limits of these three spaces: *"Exeter began in the periphery, where light is found. I felt that the reading room had to be located where a person could be alone next to a window and that it had to be a kind of private cabinet⁴, a kind of open space in the folds of the building. I made the outside of the building like a big maon arch, independent of the books. I made the interior like a concrete arch where the books were kept, away from the light. The central area is the result of these two adjoining arches; only at the entrance are the books visible through large circular openings. Thus one feels that the building possesses the invitation of books"* (Kohane, 1989, p. 99). The central area, then, as the culmination of the rest of the spaces. Three areas (three shapes) that are well differentiated, and separated according to their use and function within the building, and with specific materials for each of them.

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In Kahn's words as well: *"The cabinet is a room within the room... I made the cabinet associated with the light. It has its own window so that one can regulate one's intimacy and the amount of light one wants"* (Kohane, 1989, p. 117).



Figure 4. Central area of the Exeter Library. Author: Carol M. Highsmith. Source: [Wikipedia](#)

The form determines the use and function; and the function and use also determine, in turn, the shape of a given space. The material and the form are interrelated with each other, to end up merging in an absolute and total way. For nothing could exist without the other (Kohane, 1989, p. 101). Indeed, the central space is a small compendium of order and geometric logic; these concepts were very important to Kahn, and he took them from Renaissance architecture, where the buildings were a small-scale representation of something harmonious, beautiful, perfect and even divine (Kohane, 1989, p. 109); this Renaissance, now transformed into a modern classicism in the hands of Kahn, is clearly visible in the lines of the Library. Furthermore, for Kahn, libraries were a superior typology of buildings: they were a gateway to culture, to a higher stage for man, and all through reading. In this way, the book container (visible from the staircase), the entrance hall and the interior area symbolically represent this cultural ascent (Gil Solés, 2006).

5 The 21st century is born in Sendai

The third transformation of the library building,⁵ **the one that lays the foundations of a new model, the one that redefines from top to bottom what a library building has to be like and how it has to be like, the one that writes the introduction and the objectives of a future that had to be by digital force**, was born in Sendai; it was born with the Sendai Media Library, the work of the Japanese architect Toyo Ito. It was inaugurated in 2001, at the turn of the century and millennium, and from the very beginning it became an inescapable reference point in the construction and design of highly technological and technologically advanced libraries (today these are aspects that would seem most normal and obvious to us). The Sendai Media Library has become a paradigm, a turning point: it is the starting point for the 21st century, the century of mass digitisation of library buildings. And it already is, with large doses of blurring and invisible integration of digitalization with the building, a trend that we have seen pioneered over the years....

⁵ Although I think that the Sendai Media Library is the beginning of the 21st century in libraries, there are two more libraries that I do not want to fail to mention, even briefly, since they have also represented a substantial change of paradigm. The first is the Seattle Public Library (designed by the architect [Rem Koolhaas](#) in 2004), from which I would like to highlight two concepts: on the one hand, the sensation of dynamism, movement and flexibility, with internal functional programs that are not segregated into spaces but only one program capable of hosting all types of information in all types of media. And on the other, the "spiral of books" continues throughout the building, with which the entire collection is presented and stored, and which goes beyond the typical compartmentalisation of the collection in different rooms. The second is the Enric Miralles de Palafolls Library (a work by the [EMBT](#) studio in 2007). I think that with the Palafolls Library, the 21st century is being inaugurated in Catalonia, as it aims to conceive a building in a totally different way from the way it was built up to then. *"That's not a library, that's something else!" confirms that the architects have achieved what they wanted: the visitor does not associate the space of the Palafolls Library with what he has so far categorized with the word library. The meaning of this word has surely expanded... Or perhaps it is that these spaces should be called in some other way"* (Bonet, 2010). In addition, the Palafolls Library also incorporates aspects of permeability and visual continuity throughout the building, since the farthest points can be visualised from practically the entire space, making it possible for the space to flow in all directions, in the same way as a radial structure would, although a linear sequence can also be seen that allows uninterrupted circulation throughout the Library (Public Library in..., 2015).

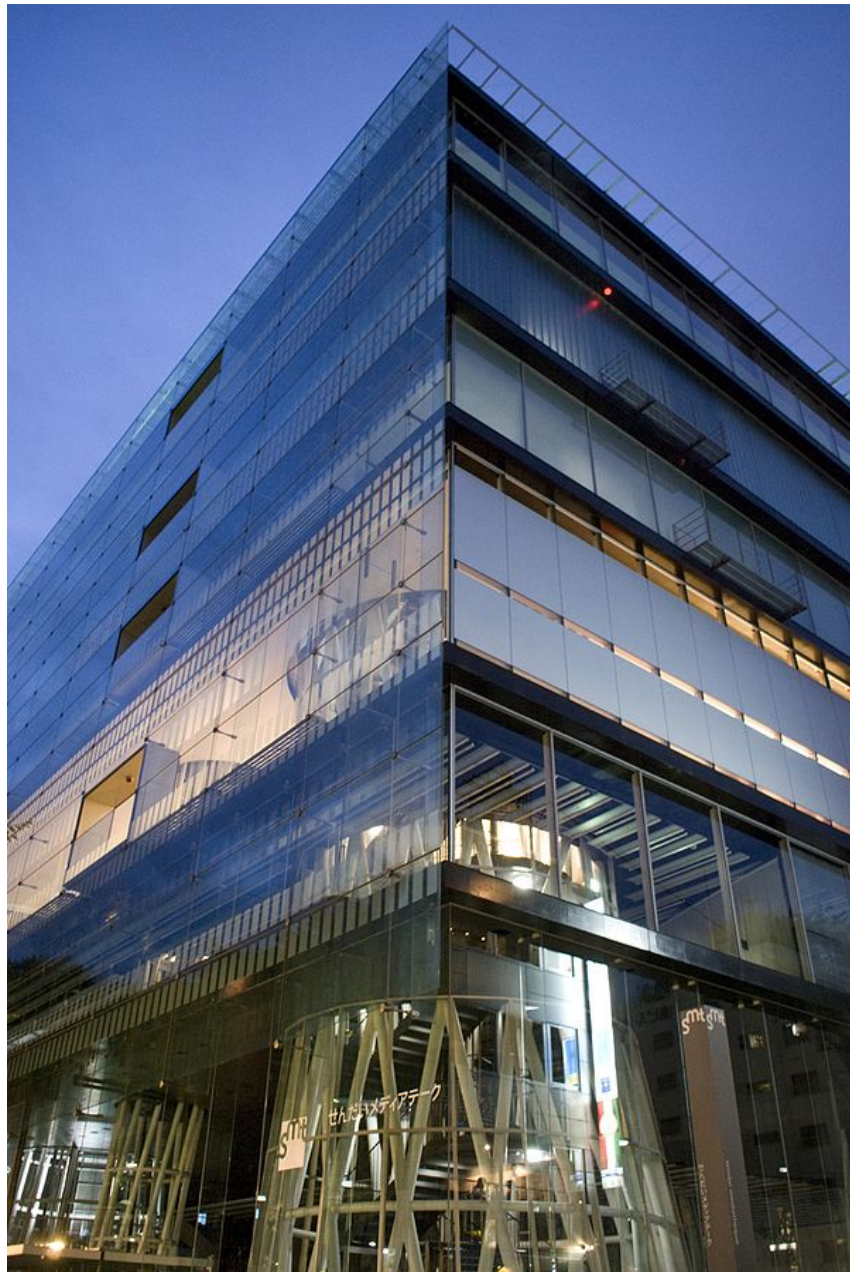


Figure 5. Media library of Sendai. Author: scarletgreen. Source: [Wikipedia](#)

Beyond its physical appearance or shape (where the 13 pipes that run vertically through the whole building and that serve to channel the building's internal communications are particularly noteworthy: wiring, telephone lines and also people), what is really interesting and what makes the Sendai Media Library unique is the concept that Ito wanted to give to the building, and which implies a totally disruptive philosophy: *"(...) We soon began to describe the building as a "media self-service". All we meant by this was that it would store different media, such as publications, videos, films, paintings and electronic art, in the same way that a supermarket stores different products on the shelves (...)"* (Ito, 2001). This conception, without a doubt, was a change of direction⁶ and accelerated the profound transformation of the library from the

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Following the desire for change, Ito himself continues in the article by talking about the redefinition that the Media Library had to entail, based on the massive incorporation of both computer science and the new horizons that could be foreseen with the arrival of the digitalization of the collections: *"(...) The Media Library had to find a way to redefine the library and the art museum - institutional forms that have remained basically unchanged for a century - by means of the incorporation of new computer resources (...)"* (Ito, 2001).

21st century onwards. **The Sendai Media Library was the starting point for a much more open, easier and more integrated conception of the building** in terms of its vision and the new ways of consuming culture and all kinds of products by the population⁷. From a professional point of view, the metaphor of self-service and supermarkets is the most accurate one: look, libraries and supermarkets have many similarities: we can walk around, choose and remove the products we are most interested in, browse through them and read their labels, take those that are visually more attractive, and take them with us. If supermarkets are so successful in today's society, it is certainly because of the ease of access, the ease of use. So why not apply the same thing in libraries? Large, diaphanous surfaces, full of shelves so that we can choose the book we like best, in a self-service store, and then go through the "checkout" and make the loan. **Nothing we see today, but in 2001 it turned out to be a real novelty.** Toyo Ito, however, went a step further in defining how and what a library building should look like, and therefore seeks a better fit within his local communities, and who thinks that "(...) *However, librarians generally have an organization that is too independent and detached from external factors. Our goal may seem modest; to destroy the isolation of a conventional library.*" (Ito, 2001) **Does Ito perhaps advance, about 10 years earlier, that digitalization would eventually break down the walls and secular isolation of the library?** In this sense Ito was undoubtedly a visionary. And it is precisely this ease of access and this break from the isolation of a conventional library that gives and fills with meaning the social, citizen and urban function that every library must have, and which Ito neither wants nor can renounce at all: "(...) *Going out into the street to create a book*" this is the stimulus I hope for from the Sendai Media Library" (Ito, 2001).

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This desire for overture expressed by Ito in his Media Library in Sendai has, however, a small precedent that has been somewhat forgotten. We have to go back to 1965, also in Japan, when "*the real principle of a library, which is to offer people easy access to documents, became a reality for the first time in Japan*" (Gil Solés, 2005). In fact, it was Mr. Maekawa, the then chief librarian of the Hino Public Library in the Tokyo metropolitan area, who chose the same year to "*establish for the first time in his library, with no other facility than a functioning "mobile library" (...) he chose to start only with a "book carrier", stating that "a library can exist without a building, the services of a library do not depend on it"*" (Gil Solés, 2005). Furthermore, Mr Maekawa's words were already hiding a strong criticism of the library building as it was in the 1960s, since "*I wanted to show that these buildings made it difficult for people to access them, they prevented library users from accessing them in an easy and simple way, without any hindrance. The libraries were closed in on themselves, with buildings and architectures that represented barriers, often insurmountable. All these obstacles did not allow the library in general, and the public library in particular, to fulfil its main function, its philosophy and its ultimate purpose: access, access and access. We had to make it easier for users to access books, the library and its services: in this sense, our good colleague broke with the rules and took his library out into the street, bringing it closer to the citizens, making it his, making it feel like his. And what better system than to conceive of a library without walls, citizen and nearby*" (Gil Solés, 2005). Unfortunately, although he was a true visionary, it seems that his conception of libraries has been somewhat forgotten. Use this little quote to keep your memory alive.

6 The library without books: digitalization colonizes the library space

The Sendai Media Library is the link between the third and fourth *re-evolution* of the library. In Sendai the book is still the predominant element in the landscape of the library. **The fourth transformation disruptively breaks this iconic image, and transforms from top to bottom the image we have of the library. The library space is being transformed, and we are moving towards a space without books, a library without books as a result of digitalization.** A magnificent example of this library without books can be found in the Library of the University of Amsterdam. It is a 2010 work of the design team formed by Ira Koers and Roelof Mulder, is already one of the many examples that are appearing more and more library without books. It is an open space of 2,508m², where there is no paper book in sight, and can accommodate between 1,500 and 2,000 students a day. Throughout the building, **great importance** has been placed **on the design and functionality of the new spaces**, devoid of their main and most significant element, which were the shelves with the books and other documents. It also stands out for its spaciousness and large empty spaces... **spaces, however, that are surely filled by users: where there used to be books, now there are people who interact and talk.** But what changes have taken place? The space left by the shelves they have filled with workspaces and the loan counters have been replaced by the so-called *red room*: a large room, on the perimeter of which there are more than 100 plastic boxes, where students will receive the physical books they have previously ordered online. A physical collection that is deposited entirely in the deposits (Labarre, 2010). It is clearly a great example of how librarians can adapt to the post-printing era, and also how librarians can (re)create a new model of building (and certainly of management and administration) successfully.



Figure 6. Red room of the Library of the University of Amsterdam. Author: Diane. Source: Dianewantstowrite.com.

We are, however, in a completely different process of re-evolution from the previous three, as it has seen its field of action broadened. Luis Fernández-Galiano affirms *"it is immediately obvious that the last metamorphosis has a different nature from the previous ones, because when we move from the material universe of the rolls, the codices or the books to the virtual world of the networks, the spatial needs of the conventional libraries vanish"* (Fernández-Galiano, 2010). The straight and unchanging principles of what we believed would never change, the buildings of our libraries, are suddenly threatened, and even their necessity and viability in their present form are questioned. Digitisation has not only affected books and printed documents, it has also had a major impact on buildings. The immutability of what we believed would never be changed has never been broken, and it is only up to ourselves and our will to change to lead this transformation and this new paradigm, which are now inevitable, to lead us. **We are immersed in an exciting historical moment: not only are we moving towards a present that is already digital, but it also involves rethinking and redefining what is possibly the most iconic and representative building of information and culture, the library.** A transformation that raises the hypothesis that the way in which libraries have been built over the last 30 years may no longer work. In no case, however, are we facing a process of disappearance, no. Rather, it is a redefinition, where a future (which is surely already present) with a positive horizon is pointed out, an ecosystem where large institutions and small-scale libraries dominate the panorama, since they offer a total adaptation of their spaces to the new uses, requirements and needs that society demands of libraries. *"After all, we human beings love to meet again, and neither can telework replace the interactive vitality of the office, nor can reading on scattered screens replace informal contact in research centres, teaching places or libraries (...) the remote library will not make our material library obsolete either"* (Fernández-Galiano, 2010). In short, digitisation will not mean the death of the library building, but it has meant that it will experience the most important disruptive change it has ever undergone: the library will no longer be the way we have always understood it; from now on it will be something else.⁸...

6.1 The impact on the building

It is at this stage that the library building has experienced the main impacts that have caused a profound acceleration in its conceptual changes. In fact, there have been three major impacts on the library, still conceived and understood as a building, which have affected three aspects: firstly, **on the façade** and on how it relates and is visualised with its immediate surroundings, which is an urban environment; secondly, **on the light** and on the way in which people live and feel the library; and thirdly and finally, on how people

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The digital transformation of the library building is not only taking place in the buildings themselves. Initiatives such as the GEPA, for example, warehouses where low-usage documents that are no longer used in libraries can be kept, and which occupy space, are also vectors of change in parallel: *"The GEPA (Guarantee of Space for Preserving Access) is a cooperative warehouse for conserving low-usage documents, while at the same time guaranteeing future preservation and immediate accessibility when a library needs it"* (Anglada i de Ferrer; Balaguer i Linares, 2011).

move and move around inside the building, that is, **on circulation**. In this section I will try to make a theoretical approach to these three points.

6.1.1 The disappearance of the façade

More than a century has passed, and the facades of libraries (especially public libraries) have undergone a radical and absolute change; it has perhaps been one of the parts of the library building that has undergone the most changes. From the first façades, practically blind and with very few windows, as we have seen in the section dedicated to the first libraries of the Mancomunitat de Catalunya, we have moved on to a completely open and transparent façade, well visible from the outside. **Although new techniques of different construction methods have played a major role in this transformation, democratization and universal access (at least on paper) to information and knowledge by broad sectors of society, which was previously completely inaccessible to them, have also played a fundamental role.** The transformation of the library façade is the most paradigmatic example of this universal access to knowledge; processes of overture and universalization that have gone hand in hand. As the façade of the library opened, so did access to culture, reading, information and knowledge. The façade as a very visible metaphor of the transformation of the building, but also as a **social and civic transformation**.

As we said, the libraries of the early 20th century looked like a temple; they were isolated and secluded, turning their backs on their surroundings, and they acted as conservators and protectors of books. And the façade was the most visible and real representation: large walls, small windows... Nothing invited in. **The façade was absolutely waterproof, and with a symbolic insulating action.** It was clearly visible and present, and it became a barrier, a wall, a border that had to be crossed.

The evolution of construction methods and, in parallel, of universal access to knowledge has had a decisive and critical impact on the form and materials of the library façade. Heavy and forceful materials have been abandoned to enthusiastically adopt new materials that **give the library façade a new function and a new symbology**. The façade gradually becomes more permeable and porous. It ceases to be a heavy wall and becomes something lighter, more open and even more passable. The façade of the library is now the link, the point of intersection between the access to the building and its surroundings. **The use of glass has played a major role in this transit**, a material that has given a new look to the library's façade. The glass has made it possible to show the outside what was happening inside the library. It has shown its rooms, its users and everything that took place in it. The **glass on the façade has exposed the library to the citizens, and the citizens to the library**. The crystal, in addition to being a functional facilitator, has also been a facilitator and a visual amplifier, since it has also allowed for an exterior-interior visual continuity, and with reciprocity. Although it creates limits, the glass is a much kinder, closer element; it is capable of creating even *non facades*: even if it functions as a closure, it allows a sensory and sensitive relationship with the environment. The glass, in spite of everything, continues

to delimit the library building. It makes it more accessible and more inclusive, but it remains a small point of connection with the outside world.

The next step, perhaps, **is the disappearance of the library façade**. From the thick walls, one has passed to the glass; and from the glass one will surely pass to the absence of limits. When this happens, the library will blend in with the city and be integrated in the best possible way: in a way that is transparent to the citizen. **I believe that we are on our way towards the disappearance of the limits of the library building, and the façade is the main boundary, the main physical frontier, of the library.** The tools and mechanisms will have to be found to do this. Perhaps the disintegration of the library into small mimic units in the urban environment is a possible way forward. But appropriate mechanisms will also have to be found to ensure that library buildings (which will still be essential) can also lose these borders.

6.1.2 Natural light

Natural light is a vital and essential element in every library, and one that decisively determines its environmental quality. It is practically a need and key aspect in the planning and design of library equipment. This is, of course, the main concern of architects and librarians. It is necessary to ensure that enough light reaches the interior of the library, but in a nuanced way; it must be illuminated, without dazzling.

However, this need to incorporate light into the very conception of libraries has not always existed. If we look at the libraries from the early 20th century, we can see that they all followed the same pattern: **buildings with blind, insulated façades and in the shape of a temple, with very few windows**. And if there were, they were located in height, and were small in size. The libraries were conceived with closed atmospheres and isolated from their surroundings, and which served as an element of protection of wisdom: hence their physical conception that enhanced this aspect. The Popular Library of Sallent, in the Bages region of Catalonia, inaugurated in 1918, is a good example.

The (re)evolution of constructive techniques, and also the modernization of society in parallel, which incorporated universal education and facilitated global access to information and knowledge for large sections of society that had previously been forbidden, **led to a transformation of the very concept of libraries**. We can situate this moment from 1945 onwards, with the extension of scientific knowledge.

In library architecture, all this led to a revolution in the facades of the libraries, and they began to talk about them as the skin of the building. A concept, that of the skin, which incorporates a basic idea: it is a living, mouldable element that can be adapted and transformed according to the needs of the library. **The skin, the façade, as an essential and active part of the library: through it one enters and leaves, through it the building breathes, oxygenates and receives a good part of the light that enters the library.** In less than a century, it has gone from blind and imposing façades to light façades, until its visual disappearance. A visual continuity has been created between the interior

and the exterior, leaving the libraries devoid of clear and defined limits. In this evolution has much to do with the almost massive (and possibly indiscriminate for the latitudes in which we find ourselves) use of glass as a constructive material of the first order. For example, the Font de la Mina Library, 2009. It is a large *"translucent box that allows a large amount of light to enter the interior through the roof windows and the sheets along all the façades"* (Bonet; Sabater, 2010). In fact, many contemporary libraries follow this same pattern, and nuance the entry of direct transverse light (and even the heat and intense sunshine that affects us for much of the year) with protective elements on the facades. The skin is transformed into something complex, and external elements are added to it in a precise and studied way, in order to allow the correct penetration of light into the interior. These elements are very diverse: sheets, lattices, curtains, translucent materials, etc....

But the skin is not just the façade: **the roof has also undergone major changes**. It has also gone from being a practically useless element to being an indispensable source of light penetration. And also, of a light very appreciated by the architects: **the zenithal light. A very different light to the transversal one, more diffused, and that provides greater sensations of comfort and environmental warmth**. On the other hand, the zenithal light allows us to reach the very heart of the libraries, to areas where the light that enters through the façades cannot reach. And for all this to happen, the use of skylights has become widespread, to channel all the light inwards, and make it scatter over the different rooms.

Managing the entry of light into libraries is a key success factor for the building, **which will be more or less functional depending on the shape and amount of light that enters the interior**. In this sense, it is necessary to speak again of Alvar Aalto, and of the treatment of light that he made for all the libraries that he designed, and especially for the Library of Viipuri. Thus, for the Finnish teacher, *"the problem of reading a book is more than an eye problem; a good reading light allows the body to position itself in many ways, adapting to all the relationships between the book and the eye. The lactation of a book implies a peculiar kind of concentration, the duty of architecture is to eliminate all possible disturbing elements"* (Stepien; Barnó, 2012). For Aalto, this *peculiar kind of concentration* can be summed up in the fact that libraries have to be an oasis of peace and abstraction thanks to the use of light, which has to be homogeneous as well as diffuse, and that *"they have to bathe books placed on showy shelves that often have the dual mission of serving as storage and at the same time are responsible for saving the usual floors on different levels"....)[and where] there is an endless play of diagonals, which make the reader always have the sensation of a continuous space"* (Stepien; Barnó, 2012). And as far as the Viipuri Library is concerned, the conception of the *oasis of peace and abstraction* reaches absolute perfection, and through the 57 skylights that are scattered throughout the reading room and that provoke a strong spatial decomposition, and through which, in addition, Aalto *"manages to provoke a sensation of space that is much greater, higher and brighter than it really is"* (Stepien; Barnó, 2012).

Finally, according to current social patterns and conceptions, a dark library will also be a barrier to access... but a library with excessive brightness will also be an obstacle for its users, who will not be able to carry out any activity (reading,

displaying screens, etc.) without annoying glare. It is convenient to find the middle point, that zone of environmental comfort in which the users feel protected and protected in a building... but at the same time feel the warm embrace of the immense light of the Mediterranean Sea.

6.1.3 Internal circulation

Internal circulation in libraries is one of those intangibles that are often overlooked in the design and planning of library buildings. We usually look at materials, furniture, textures, ambience, air conditioning... these are material elements that are relatively easy to work with in order to make them better; there is a wide range of commercial options to choose from in the best possible way.

Nevertheless, in the design of a library there are intangible elements that must be taken into account: from the sensory sensations that the library produces, to how we move through it. **And this is where we have to talk about inner circulation; an aspect that can make the difference between a usable library and one that is not.** For some authors it is so important that they think that *"the internal circulation of users, staff and documents is a key element in the distribution of spaces and in the general functioning of a library and it must be taken into account in the construction and/or remodelling project"* (Martín Gavilán, 2009, p. 5). In addition, there are also recommendations issued by public institutions responsible for libraries, such as the Management of Library Services of the Diputació de Barcelona, which considers that *"the interior distribution must be optimised, minimising the spaces dedicated to routes"* (Barcelona. Diputated. Gerència de Serveis de Biblioteques, Unitat d'Arquitectura Bibliotecària, 2013, p. 2), and that includes this recommendation in a decalogue for the design of healthy and sustainable library buildings.

In my opinion, we can approach the internal circulation of libraries from two perspectives, although both are closely related to each other.

First of all, **the circulation has to be another link between the inside and outside of the Library. The interior circulation must be able to connect with the exterior and offer sufficient points of connection so that the entry and exit of people is sufficiently optimal**, without stridency, and so that the building itself does not constitute a real insurmountable skin. The interior circulation must offer and provide sufficient points of permeability for the building to breathe, and for it to have sufficient porosity to be neither seen nor conceived as a barrier. Parallel to an increasingly evident disappearance of the facade of the libraries in terms of materials, there has **also been progress towards a blurring between the two public spaces, towards a non-perception of feeling in one place or another**: on the outside around the building, made up of squares, streets, sidewalks, etc... or in the interior public space that is configured within the library itself.

And secondly, the **inner circulation of the library itself**, without its interrelationship with the outside. The **circulation has to establish, promote and facilitate the horizontal, vertical and transversal transit**

between the different areas of the Library. With good internal circulation, this transit is fluid, instantaneous and almost imperceptible between the different areas (even, of course, between those duly separated). You have to be able to walk around, walk around almost aimlessly and in the most informal way possible inside the Library, but at the same time you must always be clear at all times where you are. There is also another characteristic of internal circulation, **and this has to do with the distribution of the entire library's collection, and with the way in which** we want our users to access it, through more formal, strict access, but also by providing sufficient drops of flexibility and modularity. there are different ways of approaching this concept, some of them innovative, such as the Spiral of Books: a continuous series of shelves in which books are organised according to different standard classifications, and which runs through the interior of the libraries, often in an ascending order. This Spiral is found in the Seattle Library (referred to above, see note 4), and also in the Library of the Musashino Art University. It is, without doubt, a modern approach to a classical and humanistic conception of the acquisition of knowledge, always on the rise, towards higher states of human intellectual development. The union of these planes of interior circulation is condensed in the words of [Sou Fujimoto](#) of Japan, architect of the [Musashino Art⁹ Library](#): *"I believe that a library must simultaneously pursue two contradictory activities. On the one hand, to read carefully and, on the other, to walk around it. Reading carefully requires a rigid and systematic spatial distribution to find the desired books. (...) The opposite characteristic to this rigid necessity is that of walking. As you walk through a library, to some extent without a specific objective, one of the important values of real books and spatial experience is the inspiration you get from unexpected findings, unforeseen relationships, unknown fields of knowledge"* (Library, Musashino Art University..., 2009). For the architect, then, the continuous spiral shelf format provides the answer to these two activities, with the necessary flexibility. **Internal circulation must facilitate access to the collection of documents in a logical, scientific and coherent way, taking into account a similar level of accessibility across all categories.**

As you can see, the first perspective cannot be understood without the second, and vice versa. There has to be a global conception of the interior circulation, to be able to insert it in the design of the building. Circulation is part of the intrinsic philosophy of the building, of its most primeval conception: how we want users to make the building serve, how we want them to feel inside it, how we want them to move, how we want them to access the documentary collections... They are not minor issues, and often make the difference between buildings. **The inner circulation is one of those things that are inserted in the sensations, in the sensory perception of the users. Making them feel comfortable and comfortable is always a challenge, and being able to set up an excellent interior circulation, taking into account the**

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Designed by Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto, the Musashino Art University Library is located in Tokyo. It was designed in 2007, and its construction took place between 2009 and 2010. It has an area of 6,500m², on 3 floors: one underground and two more in height. It can hold up to 200,000 books (100,000 in storage, 100,000 in open access). **The most outstanding element is the proposal of continuous shelving**, a concept similar to the Espiral de Libros that Koolhaas applied in the Central Library of Seattle. It is a **spiral-shaped shelf, closing from the outside to the inside, 9 metres high**, which gives the sensation of infinite, endless knowledge, and with different openings and layers. Because of its size and importance, the **entire library is itself this long shelf**.

two aspects mentioned above, is the point of difference between a good library, and another excellent library.

7 Dematerialization and guerrilla warfare: the non-library

Although digitisation at the time was, and still is, a major transformation in library spaces, their form, materials and uses, in recent years it has gone a step further, a step that affects the very foundations of the form, conception and volume of the library building. **The fifth and last of the library's transformations** has already begun, which goes beyond digitalization, **and which could be summarized as the library being immersed in a process of dematerialization of the library, a deconstruction of its buildings, a reduction of its scale into smaller, more flexible, more dynamic, and above all, more urban portions.** Because it is precisely the city, its streets, its squares and its avenues, the last frontier of the library. Digital libraries have already arrived in this environment (through mobile phones, tablets and other mobile devices)... but not yet in the building. **The library building has to stop being a building, it has to break down the walls, overcome its limits, to become urban furniture, integrated and blurred into the city's landscape,** but above all, integrated invisibly and transparently into the daily practice of anyone. Digitization is mobility, and electronic devices have quietly integrated with each other, anywhere; the library building, on the other hand, is little or no mobile in itself. As it could not be otherwise, there is no iconic building of this new way of understanding libraries. There are, however, already many examples of this new conception of library buildings today. I would like to highlight three examples, which I believe to be significant and which also have a great symbolic and beauty significance.

First of all, the **Library in Levinski Park**, a 2009 work by the team of architects Yoav Meiri Architects (Rosenberg, 2011); secondly, the **Ban Tha Song Yan Library**, located in the small Thai town of Ban Tha Song Yan, on the border with Burma, a work by the team of architects Rintala Eggertsson Architects of 2009 (Chin, 2009), where we undoubtedly find a layout and design of a library that is radically opposed to what we are used to in our latitudes; and finally, in third place, a minimalist and simple **House-Library for individual use**, a joint work of the Portuguese artist Marta Wengorovius and the architect Francisco Aires Mateus, also Portuguese, presented in the framework of the Lisbon Architecture Triennial of 2013, with the evocative title of *One, Two and Many*¹⁰ (Frearson, 2013). This cabin, which can only be used

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On the artist's website we can read a complete description of the motivations, orientation, philosophy and objectives she has wanted to give to her work. It's in Portuguese, but I think it's well enough understood: "This book is a library of 60 books that is presented as a reflection on the theme *Um Dois e Muitos*. These people were invited to choose three books: one relating to the *Um*, one relating to the *Dois* and one relating to the *Muitos*. (...) In the creation of this library there is a desire to manifest: to create a small library that is presented as a (utopian?) form of collective orientation. We notice that the future is going through small events, experiences, that contaminate us more on the way to follow than the ideologies we know. Where to reconstruct history? How to redesign and rebuild bonds of affection with the world in which we live? Will utopia today be one of these proposals for shared experiences? That's why I place the library *Um Dois e Muitos*. (...) The definition of only six books should be seen precisely on a scale that allows for an effective - possible - work of relationship between people and the proposed readings. By creating a "shelf for the community" passing from the intimate space of the private library to the public space, she created a task for and with the community, a sharing of knowledge and life. (...) Instructions for use: The reading booth is to be used by one person at a time. The books can be read in the cabin or requested together with the entity that collects the project. This travelling library shares a community made up of people who wrote the books, who chose them and who will read them wherever they go". (Wengorovius, 2017). In fact, the fund of this micro-library was born from the donations of 20 people, who chose three books three

by one person at a time, **stands out for its extreme simplicity, in an atmosphere of reading and concentration absolutely minimalist, where we only find a shelf with 60 books, and a bench for the informal reading of books. On one of the two sides of the roof there is a window that allows natural light to enter.** I like two concepts of this last work: on the one hand, to understand the library as a form of collective orientation, a fact that gives it an intellectual and erudite conception that I think we are losing; and on the other hand, the reduction of the library scale to levels of person, more within reach, a fact that allows for better work and a more effective and affective relationship between the background and the person. The example of this library, in fact, speaks to us of the scale, of a smaller, human, comfortable scale between the library space, the person and the reading¹¹ experience... A more personal, more individual scale that allows a deeper and more human relationship between these three edges of the triangle: an intimate, individual space without external conditioning, minimalist and concentrated; the person, who has a reduced, selected and unique background within his reach, and who allows focusing, concentration and non-dispersion; and finally, a more fluid, more direct and less mediated experience of reading and knowledge, where readers, books and space converge. A proposal, on the other hand, that could also be applied to centres of interest, thus also creating spaces of interest, and thus completing a round, closed and full experience.

books on three different themes: one, two and many. This is a travelling library, which will be located in a different city each year. Visitors can reserve space by time slots, or by full days.

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There has undoubtedly been a reduction in the library scale. And we are in transit towards a smaller, more reduced scale.... more gentle; **and this will inevitably involve making buildings of smaller dimensions.** There are a whole series of technical conditions that already allow for this, aspects of a more practical and pragmatic nature that have made it relatively easy to make progress in this regard. But there is also, I believe, a conditioning factor, or rather, a will, a personal and social need, which makes it desirable that the scale of library buildings should also be reduced. **This is no longer just a physical reduction of the building, but also, and more importantly, a reduction in the scale of use and in the reading scale.** Individual reading, however, will continue to be one of the core and critical elements of the libraries of the future. A reading in any medium and format; let us not look at the how, but at the what, at what is done. A reading that, thought in a broad perspective, would also become an *informative consumption*. The reduction of buildings will implicitly lead to an even more important reduction: that of the reading experience, which will radically transform the space of the library. So that this unique, individual and non-transferable experience that is individual reading, we will have to stop thinking above all about common spaces, **to try to find intimate, deep and unrepeatable spaces.** Spaces that facilitate the unique connection between reading, environment and person; a connection that always takes place on a single scale, mine, yours, his or hers... and all different but at the same time valid and essential. Spaces that also make it easier to focus on the very fact of reading and that channel a greater acquisition of knowledge and information, regardless of whether it is done with a book, a laptop or a tablet. A more than necessary personalization of the spaces would also help in this reduction. Scale is the graphical representation on paper that something real. But it can also be about facts and human matters such as reading and information. And in the age of large, impersonal information clusters, it **is a prerequisite that libraries become small, simple, and individual places of scale that allow for a better sensory and cognitive experience** in every sense. And the conception of a new reading scale is the best way to achieve this.



Figure 7. Levinski Garden Library. Author: Yoav Meiri Architects. Source: [Yoav Meiri Architects](http://YoavMeiriArchitects.com)

I firmly believe that we must move forward in the deconstruction of the library and think of a horizon in which the library buildings are also mobile, possibly also ephemeral, liquid and dissolving in the urban fabric of our contemporary and post-modern cities. Public, social and collective activities are carried out in libraries, but always under the protection provided by clear and defined limits. But the world around us is neither clear, defined nor precise. Quite the contrary. **The deconstruction, the dematerialization to which I refer is to be understood as a liquid decomposition of the library building.** The library building must cease to be a large, protected, stable, well-constructed and safe reservoir of water, where everyone can do almost anything (a space, however, with cracks and leaks and perhaps a false sense of security)... to become a small puddle, at street level, ephemeral and temporary, simple and nearby.

The library must therefore also undergo a change of identity¹²... With more risk, but maybe with more authenticity. This liquidity also channels a new form of ephemeral permanence, a temporary intervention, a scenario where other disciplines are already successfully experimenting and enjoying an excellent reputation. There are also certain mental, cultural, social and professional barriers that still have to be overcome that tend to make these new constructions inferior. This is how Ignasi Bonet expresses himself when he says that *"there is still in our subconscious the idea that the tenant of a mobile home is, in some way, inferior to someone who occupies a built house, these removable and ephemeral artifacts open up new possibilities and give more freedom to the uses that can be flattered. I believe that this is what Jordi Borja thinks of when he talks about conquering new spheres of citizenship and public space with new ephemeral uses that appear punctually in our daily lives and*

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It is inevitable here to speak of [Zygmunt Bauman](http://ZygmuntBauman.com) and his theory of liquid modernity. Bauman, in fact, defends *"the search for identity as a task and a vital responsibility of the subject. (...) In liquid modernity identities are similar to a volcanic crust that hardens, melts again and changes shape constantly. They seem stable from an external point of view, but when viewed by the subject themselves they show their constant fragility and rupture (...) In liquid modernity it is necessary to create a flexible and versatile identity that can cope with the different mutations that the subject has to face throughout his or her life"* (Morillas, 2014). This quote continues to be felt and fully valid if we change subject to library.

that allow us to overcome that distant monumentality into which culture can sometimes fall. This freedom of movement allows us to escape the odious parameter of "constructed linear metres" (which are so expensive), when what really interests us is to talk about megabytes of information, to open new windows to information flows" (Bonet, 2005).

We can even say that we are moving inexorably towards the **non-library**. Obviously, the same quality standards must also be maintained in this liquid and extremely distributed environment. Nor to create precarious libraries. No. **The ephemeral must never cause us to lose excellence, or attention to the highest standards, or to lose the necessary economic endowment, or even less the necessary qualified technical personnel.** And behind this unlibrary, deconstructed and dematerialized, there is of course no will to go backwards or put any kind of brake on it... there is none of that. Obviously, it would not be a question of simply creating ephemeral libraries, nor of dismantling the current library system (which, on the other hand, works in general terms in an excellent way). **It is simply a question of adding another variable to the library system in the form of new building possibilities, and giving a different alternative to the ephemeral experiences that are already being carried out, based until now on the temporality and physical location of users (beach libraries, swimming pools, etc.), and not so much on their information needs, which are by definition timeless and ubiquitous, and also permanent.** *In fact, "for the time being, in our country, most of these services have been focused on offering temporary services, while initiatives offering permanent service points and eventual service points are scarcer and the field to be explored in this sense is still very wide" (Bonet; Omella; Vilagrosa, 2005b).* There is still a long way to go, then. The key to everything is how to harmoniously and effectively make this need for permanence compatible with the need to provide a coherent and professional response to the ephemeral world around us.

8 Conclusions

We have seen how in little more than 100 years, libraries have been radically transformed: they have gone from the neoclassical heritage of the first libraries of the Mancomunitat, to the open and functional spaces proposed by Gunnar Asplund and Alvar Aalto. Then it underwent a radical redefinition with the "form" proposed by Kahn in which each space incorporated a specific function according to its uses but always forming a harmonious whole. And with the change to the 21st century, Sendai proposed a new library in which digital elements were already incorporated into its concept, and which represented the avant-garde of what would later be the library without books. To finally reach the dematerialization of the library building, and its decomposition into tiny, autonomous elements. Writing conclusions on the future of library buildings is therefore a risky exercise. Of risk, and also full of uncertainties. The library is a building in continuous transformation, and it will perhaps be the public building that has undergone the most changes and changes in the last century; and we may continue to see more transformations. **These transformations have been modified from top to bottom, both in their formal and conceptual aspects.** In this book we have seen 5 transformations that have brought the library to a state where many of us (professional and non-professional) might not have been able to imagine just 20 years ago. I am thinking of a future full of **guerrilla libraries** (Gil Solés, 2013), small, diffuse and distributed in every corner of the city, flexible, liquid, ephemeral and even removable, persistent, mobile and capable of meeting needs and offering answers and solutions in real time. Obviously, the great centres will never cease to exist (they are directly indispensable), but day by day I believe that they will be marked by this *librarian guerrilla*. The **library building must also definitively adopt this state of permanent liquidation that the *librarian guerrilla warfare* entails**, which allows it to colonize and be present in an efficient and effective way in the streets, in the squares of our cities, the real and authentic heart of the collective and social public space, and thus finally be an effective and affective authentic public space, and not simply a transition space or a third space. Moreover, due to our Latin tradition, our geographical location and the intensive use we make of public space, it seems inevitable that this trend will end up being consolidated. *"It seems logical, therefore, to think that in countries with Latin roots, and especially in those with a Mediterranean climate where life takes place largely in the open air, that the library can make the leap into these outdoor community spaces, urban public spaces. Likewise, if the hypothesis of a library-public space synergy already makes sense in any city with a well-established citizenship, it acquires special meaning in Mediterranean cities, where the tradition of the occupation of public space by citizens is a historical fact and clearly integrated into the daily habits of its inhabitants"* (Bonet; Omella; Vilagrosa, 2005a). All this is no small thing, but they are immense challenges that we will have to **overcome**.

9 Epilogue

As an epilogue to the book, I have recovered three articles I wrote in my blog, which reflect on the loss of library space by librarians themselves, and on the philosophy that should be adopted in library spaces to give respect to the social, cultural and community needs to which they must respond. And as in the case of the entire book, I have also improved and expanded on these three articles, trying to maintain their original meaning with which they were written. **I hope that these three articles will serve as a final reflection beyond the deconstructed space;** because beyond the physical space there will always be a mental space that we should never renounce, and that no one, ever, will steal from us.

The missing space of the librarians

The space, place and social, civic and community function of the library has already become the **winning card to ensure the future survival of libraries and librarians**. The space, the good - or rather, the excellent conception, the precise design and a surgical management of the library space (of any library space) must guarantee success: A success that will surely last for a very long time, thanks to excellent professionals who are passionate about their work and everything they do, and also to a large extent to the evident harshness and depersonalisation of contemporary cities; and also to the necessary and essential search for an ideal and even idealised space, which will humanise and simplify our social, community and closer relations. **Is the library perhaps that utopian space where we are allowed to slow down, think, meditate calmly and delicately, and through which we can better understand the world, and** is the space of abstraction that Aalto sought in his libraries still valid? I think so, yes. However, the central axis of this utopian will has not been in the library's bibliographic and documentary collection for a long time now; on the contrary, it is centred and based on people and space. The people who inhabit the library, its facilities and its corners and spaces **are the true value of contemporary libraries of the 21st century**. And I venture to assure you that it will be so for many years to come.

And despite this hopeful future (and I do not deny that it also has an idyllic and innocent point of view) of libraries, I believe that we librarians, the professionals who work in them, have lost our steam, and we are disoriented and disoriented: **more and more people, users and everything they do in libraries, often without the intervention of librarians, have taken total and absolute control of everything that happens in the library**. Users have taken over and internalized the library space as their own, as intimately their own, and even as a natural, logical and indispensable extension of their daily activities (both personal and professional). It is probably the most intense appropriation of a public building that has ever taken place. We librarians have created a product of such quality that we may have been overtaken by success, and the appropriation of space has overtaken us... to the **point that**

our own professional space is also beginning to be questioned... Are we the librarians absolutely indispensable and necessary for the management of library space? Possibly the answer is no, and even experiences of self-management of spaces are already appearing in certain libraries, and applied to specific user groups. For example, the case of the [Espai Jove](#) of the [Biblioteca Comarcal de Blanes](#), in the region of La Selva (Catalonia), an experience that also won the 3rd Teresa Rovira Prize in 2015, an award that *"wishes to recognise those facilities that have carried out innovative projects and have created or reinforced their presence in the territory through the creation of a social network with the involvement of different agents"* (La Biblioteca comarcal de Blanes..., 2015). It was possibly the first experience in Catalonia (or at least the first I know of). This *Espai Jove* is already based on the premise of *"encouraging the self-management of the room by the young people themselves during opening hours, and thus creating a space"without librarians" that will help them to foster their autonomy and have a positive impact on the perception of this space by young people"* (Ciuró; Garcia, 2015). I am convinced that this will be a path that will increasingly have to be explored with great and intense necessity. **And it will undoubtedly be something that will be demanded of us professionals;** we will have to be attentive to these demands, and they will have to be met with the usual speed and quality. Failure to do so will put us at a disadvantage with respect to other groups and also with respect to other spaces and facilities in the city.

In this situation we are defenceless, no doubt. **It leaves us in a weak position, of professionals perhaps and surely expendable in the eyes of a good part of society.** Yes, even today and in this day and age, for bad luck. But I am talking about professionals, and I am not, and this is the paradox, about libraries: is there perhaps a huge gap between the what and the who, have we sold ourselves as well as our libraries? Humbly, and it's just a simple opinion, I don't think so. There is a clear identification between content and content in certain professions. You don't have to say them, we already understand each other and we all know what they are. No one, absolutely no one, conceives certain equipment without their corresponding professionals to manage and administer it. **But we are entering and exploring new horizons in which we ourselves want to quickly erase this correspondence, this perhaps automatic identification.** We may have to stop, reflect deeply and think, meditate, what we want to be, and recover old ways of understanding the profession that today have been ignored and that are held in a second term: *"The ideal of the humanist librarian for whom Casazza advocates is none other than that of a great project of dialogue between the legacy of ancient libraries and the vision of the way in which modern libraries are requested by new technical and instrumental knowledge. It is not a question - he says - of books being kept in a precise custody but of risking the world, taking with them the specific knowledge of how they are to be protected, but of acting with this care in the world. There is the reader, who not only exists to return a book to the consultation room to prolong its existence among men, but who himself - the reader - has to be created by the library and called where perhaps he never imagined he would go. A true library, indeed, is one that receives the readers and also one that creates, recreates and inquires them"* (Casazza, 2004, p. 3), in the words of Horacio González in the prologue.

So, what position do we professionals want to be in within our own physical and work (and often personal) ecosystem? Where do we want to be, where do we want to be, where do we want to be seen? Or perhaps the opposite is the case: that we do not want to be seen, and that what we want is to pull the strings of our organisations from the shadows. **Or maybe, simply, nothing is so complicated....**

Spaces for fascination

We live in an environment of hyperaccelerated cultural consumption, almost throwaway. What is new today may well no longer be so the following week, at best. There is almost no time for reflection, for serene and slow, profound debate, for introspection, for the contrast of opinions and positions. An expressive culture, in which what is important is the consumption itself, the figures, the immediate impact. In the midst of this disableable and depersonalized speed, more and more spaces have been needed to stop, stop... think twice, meditate on our actions, our past, our present and also on our future. New attitudes, new ways of being, so that users can come *"without rushing. You're in the library. This is your moment of leisure, the moment of the day that is just for you, enjoy the silence and get lost in the shelves"* (Gómez, 2016). Spaces of spirituality, modern secular temples and new spaces for the *"congregation of diverse populations,[which] multiply the opportunities for meeting and[which] generate a kind of"social ecumenism""* (Libraries, third place, 2012). Libraries must be those spaces that help us to connect much better with our physical environment and also with our social, personal and human environment. **Spaces of connection between our social self and our individual self.** A space in which *"the public library[I would add that not only the public library] can be (it has to be) that space that encourages the slow encounter of users and readings"* (Moreno, 2016). In order to respond to this need for *slow* spaces and *slow*¹³ libraries, libraries are at the forefront. And they are so in two ways: on the one hand, avant-garde for society; and on the other, they are also avant-garde for ourselves, for librarians.

Libraries must be able to return to being an oasis in the midst of this cultural frenzy that deifies everything that is immediate; to recover that somewhat lost golden space of high culture and knowledge, of silence and concentration, of the highest scientific and intellectual creation. And above all, they must once again become spaces of respect and values for slow, slow-moving work; for maximum dedication to research work, without the modern conditioning factors of immediacy and actuality at any price. Libraries must be the anchor and connection point between the unique and unrepeatable dimension of every human being (and of his or her deepest knowledge), and the most collective and communal dimension as animals that we are. In this way, from all these ingredients, *"Bibles can resist as warm, pleasant, creative and slow social spaces, given the acceleration imposed, especially in large cities, by population density, distance, the omnipresence of screens and permanent connectivity.*

¹³

There is the Slow Library movement, born in 2006 thanks to Mark Leggott. You can read his manifesto in [Slow Library Movement](#) [Consulta: 15/01/2018], which is condensed in 5 strong ideas: educating about the risks of monoculture and monoculture (etymologically related); preserving and promoting the local; crafts and small-scale production; teaching and learning from everyone; enjoying friends and the community. (Rodríguez García, 2016).

Libraries as places to relax, places that invite you to spend as much time as you like, reading for pleasure, reflecting, enjoying. Places where dynamic spaces of creation and social interaction coexist with comfortable and quiet environments where to investigate, study, read little by little or listen to music. Places where all the time they need is dedicated to the users with a personalized and warm treatment. Places where library staff are not overwhelmed by multitasking. Libraries where fewer things are done to make them better" (Rodríguez García, 2016). Libraries must be capable of radiating beauty in their surroundings, of being generators and promoters of the most absolute *pulcrum*. I like and venture to think of libraries as neuralgic centres and strongly connected with the most radical [personalism](#), in which (and taking the text from Wikipedia) *man is "considered as a relational being, essentially social and communitarian, a being that is book, transcendent and with a value in itself that allows him to become an object as such. A moral being, capable of wanting, of acting in function of an actualization of his powers and finally of defining himself always considering the nature that determines him"*.

And it is in this new environment that we are more relaxed, calmer, and with libraries as a critical and core element for society, that they also acquire a new role and a new role for ourselves, for librarians themselves. The library space then becomes **a new space for fascination** with ourselves, for recovery and awareness of our deepest, most essential values. This new space, almost sacred in the conceptual sense of the library, is the perfect setting for the recovery of that lost fascination, to make us feel again a priority, central and indispensable axis of the cultural and human development of people. Fascination has to start with oneself and one's closest professional and human environment; and libraries as a beacon of fascination for culture and knowledge are our best letter of introduction to make librarians, too, the object of fascination and desire for the deepest cultural needs, and to make ourselves fascinated by everything we do and everything we stand for. **The architecture of the need also for us.**

The Librarian Unum, or the fascination for the univocal

If in the previous text on spaces for fascination I proposed a new approach to library spaces under the gaze of beauty and the *pulcrum*, with a strong incidence of personalism, I will now continue to develop my argument, and I will propose a second stage, a stadium more towards a more than necessary transcendence of library spaces and libraries in general. A new transcendence that makes us arrive at the univocal, understood as that in which there is no doubt, **but also as that which arose first.**

From this first recovery of the fascination for the spaces of libraries, it is a necessary and essential second stage to reach the fascination of the transcendence that they suppose, or that libraries should suppose in contemporary societies; transcendence that materializes, and I take Carles Llinàs i Puente's words, through the *"fascination for the Unum, for the first transcendental, in what the others reflect"* (Llinàs i Puente, 2004, p. 9). The Unum as a primeval space, original and capable of generating other spaces similar to its image and similar. Something like the beginning of all spaces, and

that works as a catalyst for symmetrical spaces. The Immaterial and Absolute Librarian Unum, a concept of transcendent space materialized in multiple symmetrical library unums under the same philosophy of fascination and beauty. A library Unum capable of anchoring human beings in their social, human and cultural environment, under a logic based on a triad of three main elements: **order, structure and art**. And I venture to propose that the Librarian Unum, as the third neutral space¹⁴ where community life explodes and vibrates in all its intensity, has been able and continues to be able to generate asymmetric unums outside the library environment, and which reflect and shape its three basic principles that I mentioned earlier.

I propose this path, this new philosophy of the third library space, to try to reverse the incipient (or perhaps no longer so) secularization of the mission and the conception of libraries. I sense signs that point to a loss of horizons, of value and of values of what we mean. On this point, I agree with the reflection made by Professor Llinàs: *"For quite some time now, the formula "fascination for the univocal" has appeared to me as a reasonably suitable way of condensing at least one of the main threads through which I perceive a certain horizon in my surroundings and, therefore, the possibility of orienting myself"* (Llinàs i Puente, 2004). And it is precisely this search that is one of the lights that must guide us.

¹⁴

It is a term created by the American sociologist Ray Oldenburg in 1989, and which "distinguishes the first space, the sphere of the house, and the second space, the sphere of work. It is understood as a complementary space dedicated to the social life of the community, and refers to areas where people can meet, meet and interact informally" (Library, third place, 2012). Oldenburg does not initially include libraries within the third space. Later, sociologists like Robert Putman or historians like Alistair Black did.

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